

A currency-fiber 'find' becomes a \$1 dud

By Roger Boye 408

This week's column answers several questions about paper money, an ever-popular collectible.

Q—We've got a \$1 bill that has a dozen hairlike objects—all red or blue—embedded into the paper within a small area on the right side. Are they the government's way of making us patriotic?—S.P., Mendota

A—Hardly. In an attempt to thwart would-be counterfeiterers, the Treasury Department prints currency on paper containing tiny color fibers. Even expert con men say the fiber-filled paper is tough to imitate.

On rare occasions, machines that produce the paper cluster fibers in one spot rather than spreading them evenly. But despite the novelty, unusual fiber groupings add little to a bill's value on the collector's market.

Q—While shopping for groceries, I received in change a \$5 bill with an extremely low serial number—00096478. Is my note special?—J.F., Kenosha, Wis.

A—Not to hobbyists. Serial numbers starting with at least four zeros command a premium, with the highest values for the lowest numbers.

For example, a \$1 bill with the serial number 00000001 might retail for as much as \$125 in uncirculated condition, says currency expert Chuck O'Donnell. But an uncirculated \$5 bill with a serial number starting with four zeros might fetch \$10 or less, he adds, and a bill like yours with only three zeros has no special value.

Q—Our dog Snoops ate huge chunks out of three \$10 bills while we were fixing her dinner. What can we do to get our money back?—A.T., Rockford

A—The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago will exchange mutilated currency for new bills if you still have at least 60 percent of each bill. Guards at the bank entrance, 230 S. LaSalle St., will direct you to the right office.

If your dog ate more than 40 percent, mail the fragments to the Treasury Department with a letter explaining how the damage occurred [I'll send you the address]. Let's hope Snoops enjoyed her snack, because you may not get a refund if just small portions of each bill remain.

Q—For at least 30 years we've saved three \$1 silver certificates of series 1935A with bright yellow designs. I'm told the seal should be blue on silver certificates. Do we have an error note?—T.L., Chicago

A—Uncle Sam printed your bills for circulation among U.S. troops in North Africa in Sicily during World War II. If the enemy had captured large amounts of the currency, the U.S. government would have demonitized all \$1 bills with yellow seals.

Dealers sell "fine condition" specimens of the \$1 "North Africa note" for \$8 or so. Crisp, uncirculated bills go for about \$30.

Q—For a school assignment I need to know what designs are on the back sides of money currently being printed. Please hurry, my assignment is due soon.—A.S., Harvey

A—Independence Hall is depicted on the \$100 bill; the U.S. Capitol, \$50; White House, \$20; U.S. Treasury building, \$10; Lincoln Memorial, \$5; a painting of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, \$2; and the Great Seal of the United States, \$1.

Questions about paper money or coins? Send them to Roger Boye, Arts & Books, Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611. Enclose an addressed, stamped envelope if you want a personal reply and allow at least four weeks for an answer.